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ABSTRACT

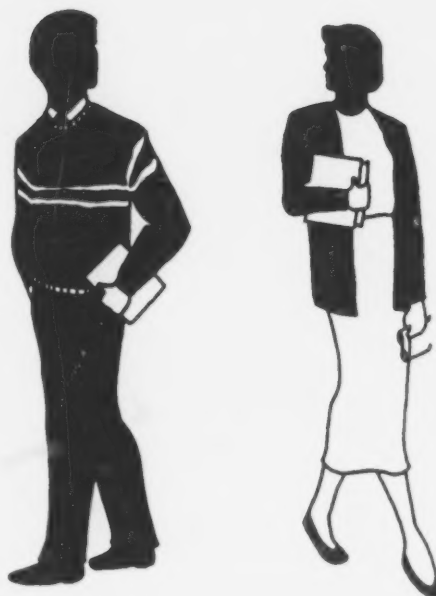
This case report describes a series of conflicts centering on gender issues at a large metropolitan high school. The case is accompanied by discussion questions designed to present prospective teachers with complex professional problems, asking them to interpret the situation and decide upon possible solutions. The report was written to develop teaching students' abilities to spot issues and frame problems as a new teacher in a highly factionalized school environment. The case opens with a confrontation between a senior student, Jeanne Campbell, and school vice principal Frank Leyden. According to Jeanne, Leyden told her that young women who dressed provocatively were "asking for it" when she suggested that he sponsor a rape awareness workshop. The vice principal asserts that Jeanne had misinterpreted his remarks. Austin Nickerson, a new English teacher, is asked to witness the confrontation and must make a public statement about the meeting when Jeanne's parents consider bringing suit against Leyden. Nickerson is also witness to a host of other gender-related problems involving students, faculty, and administration at the school. Questions following the case report encourage extensive discussion regarding the high school staff's responses to gender-related problems both in the school at large and in the classroom. Two exercises ask teaching students to analyze Nickerson's reading requirements and assess his classroom techniques for possible gender bias. The case is based on authentic occurrences at a large urban high school, but names and identifying details have been changed to protect confidentiality. (TES)

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Teaching Cases in Cross-Cultural Education
No. 6

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**GENDER
WARS
AT
JOHN
ADAMS
HIGH SCHOOL**
A Case Study



Paris Finley

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Gender Wars at John Adams High School: A Case Study

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This case is based on authentic occurrences at a large urban high school. Names and identifying details have been changed to protect confidentiality.

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Introduction

Gender Wars at John Adams High School describes a series of conflicts centering on gender issues at a large metropolitan high school. The case opens with a confrontation between a senior student, Jeanne Campbell, and the vice principal, Frank Leyden. According to Jeanne, the vice principal told her that young women who dressed provocatively were "asking for it" when she suggested to him that he sponsor a rape awareness workshop. The vice principal asserts that Jeanne entirely misinterpreted his remarks. Austin Nickerson, a new English teacher, is asked to witness this confrontation. When Jeanne's parents later consider bringing charges against the vice principal for intimidating their daughter, Nickerson must make a public statement about what actually happened at this meeting. Nickerson must also decide what he can do, if anything, about a host of gender-related problems at the school.

Gender Wars is based on an authentic situation with the names and identifying details changed to protect confidentiality. This case was NOT selected because it is representative of teaching situations in metropolitan areas. It was selected because it presented in a concrete and dramatic context a difficult teaching situation that students would benefit from reflecting upon. The case provides a specific context for thinking about such issues as gender equity in schooling, the culture of a school and its resistance to change, and the difficult position of a new teacher in a highly factionalized organization.

Purposes of Teaching Cases

Teaching cases have long been a cornerstone of professional preparation in school of law, business, and medicine. Only recently have educators begun to explore their value in the preparation of teachers (Doyle, 1986; Shulman, 1987; McCarthy, 1987). The teaching case is not merely a narrative, one teacher's story. Nor is it a research case study, a detailed

description of a particular situation accompanied by theoretical interpretations.

A teaching case, rather, presents a complex professional problem and asks students to interpret the situation and decide upon a strategy. The case asks the student to figure out "what is really going on here?" "what went wrong?" and "what can be done about it?"

In the teaching case, interpretations are left open and loose ends are not tied up. Relevant information is not always known, and known information is not always relevant. The teaching case demands analysis of problems and the design of a plan for action on the basis of inadequate knowledge. Professional practice demands wise action in situations where the "truth" is not known.

Teaching cases are intended to provide vicarious experience with important professional dilemmas in order to prepare students for the actual problems of practice. Such problems rarely raise merely technical questions. They involve issues of values, policy questions, and interpersonal matters as well as pedagogical concerns. Teachers, like many other professionals, work in situations of complexity, ambiguity, and disorder where it is not clear what goals are desirable or where several desirable goals conflict (Schon, 1983). In *Gender Wars at John Adams High School*, as an example, the goal of increasing female participation in class discussions may conflict with the goal of creating a natural, relaxed discussion atmosphere in which students are comfortable and creative. The case shows students how everyday problems of practice, such as deciding on what to read in sophomore English and deciding how to form writing groups, raise subtle questions of equity and ethics.

The particularity of the teaching case is especially valuable in helping students apply theoretical concepts to concrete situations. The issue is not merely how to act as a new faculty member in a polarized organization but how Austin Nickerson, a particular person with particular strengths and weaknesses, should act in this organization, with its special history and configuration of personalities. Good case teaching develops the habit of re-

flecting upon concrete situations and coming up with a design for action which takes into account not only principles but also particularity.

In short, teaching cases like *Gender Wars* give prospective teachers vicarious experience with important professional problems. They increase teachers' ability to:

- identify the issues in a troubling situation and frame these problems in productive ways,
- understand the complexity of professional problems and the way ethical, interpersonal, and policy issues may be contained in what may seem to be routine classroom decisions,
- apply relevant theoretical concepts and research findings to concrete situations,
- appreciate how a situation may look from the perspective of different participants,
- go beyond the immediate, surface problems to the identification of more fundamental, underlying issues,
- identify a number of possible strategies for handling problems, and
- recognize crucial decision points and the likely consequences and potential risks of different courses of action.

A good case, like a good story, also gives pleasure. Students typically enjoy reading cases and thinking about these human dramas.

Studying and Teaching a Case

In reading and teaching a case, it is helpful to keep in mind the following general kinds of questions. Most have been culled from the instructor's guide to *Teaching and the Case Method* (Christensen, Hansen, & Moore, 1987) and from discussions about case method teaching (Christensen, 1987).

These questions are:

1. What are the central issues in this situation? Which are most urgent? Which are most critical?
2. What, if anything, should anyone do? Who? When? How? Why do you think so?
3. What did the principal characters actually do? With what results? With what potential long-term consequences?
4. How does this situation appear to other participants? the students? faculty at various points on the ideological spectrum? the principal? the head of the teachers' association?
5. How did this situation develop? What, if anything, might alter the basic conditions which created the present difficulties?
6. What, if anything, have you learned from the case?

In teaching a case, we typically ask students to prepare for class discussion by writing a two-page paper outlining what they see as the major issues in the case and appraising the actions of the principal character. After the case discussion, we ask students to write another short paper on what they now see as the fundamental issues in this case, what actions they would advise the teacher to take, and what they have learned or come to appreciate as a result of the case discussion.

A particularly effective way to begin teaching *Gender Wars at John Adams High School* is to ask three students to role-play the opening scene, the confrontation between Jeanne Campbell and Frank Leyden, with Austin Nickerson looking on and attempting to mediate. Discussing what each character is thinking and feeling and where each would be located on stage helps to develop students' understanding of the issues and tensions played out in the scene.

After discussing what went wrong in this interview, students can be given the opportunity to recast the opening scene and reenact it as they think it should have been played. What should Leyden have said? Who should he have asked to come to the meeting? Where should the meeting have been held? As students attempt to play the scene and make it come to a better ending, they may find the going more difficult than they expected.

Discussing what is going on the second time and why it is so hard to resolve this issue may prove to be especially revealing.

Organization of *Gender Wars at John Adams High School*

This case is accompanied by a series of discussion questions intended to illuminate various facets of the case and an epilogue which describes what happened in the actual situation.

Two specific exercises follow the case. The first exercise asks students to analyze the reading list for sophomore English at John Adams High School and to consider the criteria for selecting particular works of literature. The second exercise asks students to analyze classroom interaction in Austin Nickerson's sophomore English class and to consider what is causing and maintaining certain communication patterns which may or may not contribute to gender inequities.

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Characters in *Gender Wars at John Adams High School*

Austin Nickerson—English Teacher

Frank Leyden—Vice Principal

Jeanne Campbell—Senior Student

Gwen Frobisher—English Teacher

Deborah Myers—Physical Education Teacher

Tanya Bradford—Art Teacher

The Office Incident

Austin Nickerson's palms were sweating in sympathy. With his face assuming a neutral look, he observed the young woman sitting opposite the vice principal of this large urban high school, Frank Leyden. He saw her frown. She tilted her head back and her jaw trembled a moment as tears gathered in the corners of her eyes, but she did not make a move to wipe them. Austin realized why Vice Principal Leyden had asked him to sit in on the conversation—in today's litigious atmosphere no right-minded administrator (or teacher, for that matter) would sit alone in a room with a student. Careers could end that way. Since he had been the one to bring word of the rumor to Leyden, he was the logical choice as third party to witness the meeting, but he did not like the way this thing was going. He felt uncomfortable himself, so he could easily empathize with the senior girl who straightened herself in her seat as Frank Leyden tried again to make his point.

"Jeanne, what did I say?" he leaned across his desk toward Jeanne Campbell. Frank Leyden was a big man, six feet tall or a bit over, with the look of a former football player. Austin, on the bench beside the desk, found himself feeling more and more uncomfortable. The office seemed to close in, to become smaller. Austin felt an overwhelming urge to jump up, raise the blinds, and fling the door open. He did not move. Leyden's voice went up a notch in volume. "Just tell me what I said."

"You said . . ." her voice trailed off, but her eyes met Leyden's. She tried again, "You told me that sometimes it's the girl's fault." Jeanne's eyes moved upward as she tried to recall the conversation which had brought her once again to an emotional confrontation with the administrator.

"No, that's not what I said. What did I say, Jeanne?"

Austin looked at Leyden quickly. Was he, too, feeling uncomfortable? He seemed somehow too insistent. Why was he pressuring her like this? Couldn't he see how distraught she was getting?

Leyden put his hands palm outward in a gesture of rejection. "You came to me," he stated. His voice was (typically for the self-controlled administrator) flat, unemotional, but he seemed too loud for the small office, door closed. "You came with this article," he turned around and tapped a newspaper article taped to the wall behind him amidst other clippings which touted the successes of John Adams High School's teams, "and you told me some of the things that were in the article."

Austin looked at the headline, "Campus rape 'extremely serious problem': Assaults affect 1 out of 4 college women." Jeanne must have had a ton of nerve, he thought, to have been willing to approach an administrator on her own with this. According to the rumor he had heard, Jeanne claimed Leyden had said rape happened to girls who "were asking for it" by wearing short skirts or low-cut dresses. The shocked Austin had taken it right to the source immediately, hence the present confrontation.

Leyden went on. "Jeanne, you told me when we met last Monday, for example, that in most cases the victim knows the rapist." Leyden looked at Austin as if for corroboration, forgetting for a moment that Austin had not been present at the first talk. "You told me that many times alcohol or drug use is an issue in these cases. And what did I say to you?"

A barely controlled voice replied, "You said then that the way the girl dresses or that when she gets into a car with a bunch of guys that she's asking to be raped."

Leyden rolled his eyes and looked at her and paused. He shook his head. "I said I agreed with you and that in many cases, alcohol and drugs are involved—"

"You said it like only the girl gets drunk—"

"Only the girl is a victim. What I said was that girls who drink too much in certain circumstances are running a risk."

"And the way they dress. You made it sound like girls who flirt or tease are asking to get raped. You made it seem like rape is the girl's fault."

"Now wait a minute. I didn't say that. You may have taken it that way, but that's not what I said and it certainly is not what I meant. You can ask anyone. I have a lot of respect for women. You came in here with these, this article, and what have I done? You said you thought we ought to let the senior girls know about this—that maybe we needed a program, and what did I say?"

"You didn't seem very excited about the idea."

Leyden pursed his lips wryly. "I don't get excited; it's not my style and it's not my job."

Austin tried to lighten the mood. "That's true, Jeanne, he doesn't show much emotion. That's the way he is."

Jeanne opened her mouth to speak, but Leyden beat her to it.

"I told you I couldn't say anything until I talked to Mr. Simpson. Like it or not, he's the principal, and I can't give the OK for something like that unless he approves it. I told you I'd talk to him, didn't I?"

Jeanne's tears left tracks down the side of her face and still Austin noticed she made no move to wipe them. She kept her head up and her eyes on Leyden. Austin tried to think of something to say. Softly he said, "This is very upsetting, Jeanne; it's an upsetting subject. You've done well to bring this up; it's an important issue."

Neither Jeanne Campbell nor Frank Leyden seemed to hear. "I did talk to Benny—Mr. Simpson—and he said 'fine' so I've contacted Cindy Horne, the health teacher, and she said she didn't know anyone who could do a presentation for us, but she would ask around."

Jeanne's look said it all. She had nothing more to say. Austin Nickerson knew it, and for the life of him he couldn't figure why Leyden couldn't see it. Austin took one more stab at bailing them out, "Sometimes, Jeanne, if one person has an idea, or several—like you did when you came in—the other person will kind of piggyback, you know, sort of build on your idea? I really think that's what Mr. Leyden did. You offered some problems, and

he pointed out some more. He wasn't arguing against you. He was adding to your argument."

Austin decided to say something for Leyden's benefit, too. "There's a huge difference between flirting, acting sexy, even having sex with someone, and rape. Those things don't *lead* to rape." Jeanne looked absolutely frightened at the direction he'd taken the conversation. "There's a big difference," he added lamely, as he wished the whole scene over. It was ending as badly as it had begun, he thought. Austin wondered why she was resisting his efforts at reconciliation so stubbornly; her attitude reminded him of trying to argue about religion with someone.

Leyden took up his cause again: "When Mr. Nickerson came in here—" Leyden turned to Austin, "You tell her what you said to me."

Austin looked at Jeanne. "Jeanne, you know I don't even know you. All that happened was that at lunch today two or three of my colleagues were saying that they had heard that Mr. Leyden had told a senior girl that in rape cases, a lot of time it's the girl's fault. I was upset at hearing a rumor like that, so I came to Mr. Leyden this afternoon to let him know what I had heard."

Jeanne nodded.

"Mr. Leyden called you down right away, and he asked me to sit in. I'm not really involved in this except that if there's some kind of misunderstanding—"

"—it is a misunderstanding," interrupted Leyden, "and I hope you realize, Jeanne, that I'm supporting your idea. I can't just go off on my own on something like that. I don't run the school. A lot of people need to give the OK. And I certainly want you to know that I would never say that any girl deserves to be raped. That's just," he shook his head, "just outrageous."

"And if that's what you thought," said Austin, "whether you were right or not, doesn't matter. You were right to be upset." Jeanne's face seemed remote. They weren't reaching her, he concluded. Leyden talked for a few

minutes more, but Austin barely heard him. Finally, Austin turned to Leyden and stood up. "I've got to get back to class." Jeanne stood up, too.

"OK, Austin. Thanks for joining us."

"Right. I'll see you later, Jeanne."

Going down the corridor, Austin was deep in thought. "That was awful. I really don't think Frank said what she thought he did, but he knew the girl had not accepted the explanation." He paused in thought, and Jeanne caught up to him as she went by in the corridor. "I'm sorry, Jeanne, that wasn't what I—"

"He may think that's it." She turned on him, her face fierce, lips trembling. "Well, it's not! I told my parents about him, and now wait 'til they hear about this! They said they'd get me a lawyer if I needed one."

"Jeanne, I—"

"This school is so sexist!" She spun away and stormed down the hallway.

Austin stood with his mouth slightly open, feeling gut punched. Somehow he had gotten himself on the wrong side of this thing. And Frank Leyden—what had he done? What was going to happen to him? Jeanne Campbell was very angry. Austin knew how parents reacted when their children were upset. People dug into positions, and rational talk flew out the window. Things did not look good, especially for Frank. What next?

The Classroom Incident

Austin's stomach was still churning when he reached his room. He wanted to sort things out, but his preparatory period was nearly at an end. A few things remained to be done; he reached for his plan book and within moments was immersed in the immediate concerns of his upcoming class. He did not notice his door quietly open.

"Got a minute?"

Austin looked up from his desk to see his colleague, Gwen Frobisher.

"Always, for you, Gwen. What's up?"

"Thanks, I needed that," she forced a smile.

He rose quickly from the desk to sit in a student's seat near the door. She sat next to him. He sensed stress and mirrored her body language to put her at ease.

"This place," she shook her head, "this place, sometimes, you know what I mean?"

"Life is not perfect here—is that what you came to tell me, Gwen?"

She laughed. "I get so . . . so . . . worked up."

"It's hard not to. What happened?"

"You know Kyle Laubach?"

Austin rolled his eyes quickly and nodded. "I've got him in lunch duty—one of the junior boys, good-looking and he knows it, clean-cut, arrogant—that Kyle?"

"Plays soccer—which makes him divine God around here. He has a problem with women, female authority. I've seen him with his mother. He tells her off right in front of people. I suspect his father is the same way. He's always manhandling some girl—"

"—manhandling?"

"Well, you know, holding her while she struggles to get free. Power trip stuff. Trapping them between his arms up against the locker—"

"Always stopping just short of—"

"Right, passive-aggressive all the way."

"You had a run-in?"

"Literally. I have him in the same class with Mark Howe and Len Weintraub."

"His favorite audience."

"Right, so I'm coming back from lunch and the three of them are coming down the hall, bumping into each other so that they can careen into the girls along the hallway, and I tell them 'knock it off, guys,' and they give me this lip about how 'he pushed me, Mrs. Frobisher.'"

"Typical."

"So far, yeah, but then I go in my room and Kyle comes in, and he's walking up to me really angry, aggressive, like he's going to punch me out, and he stops about this far from my face," Gwen gestured, "and I just looked at him; he turns on his heel, really spins around, and then he just explodes and he takes one of the desks and throws it at me."

"What?! Are you—did he—"

"No, I'm OK. He didn't hit me."

"He picked it up and threw it?"

"No, he shoved it, but right at me—and it made a huge noise so of course everyone came running in."

"What did you do?"

"I told him to go to the office, and he walks really cool to the door and then just as he goes out of sight I hear him say 'bitch' really loudly."

Austin let out a long breath. "Wow."

Gwen turned her head sideways and looked right at him, "That's not the bad part."

Austin got a sudden sinking feeling in his stomach. He suspected that the principal, Benny Simpson, might be at the heart of the issue. Gwen was talking rapidly. Austin was not in suspense for long.

"I went to Benny—I was so mad I was shaking—I went and told him I wanted to talk to him right away. He tried to say he'd be with me in a minute, and I said, 'Now, Benny!' I told him what happened and you know what he said to me?" Austin was still. "He told me, he said, 'What did you say to him?' Can you believe that? 'What did you say to him'—like it was my fault!" Gwen's anger started to rise again. "I told him I wanted Kyle kicked out, right then and there. Call his parents and tell them to come and take their 'little boy' home."

"Did he?"

"Not at first, I had to tell him I'd call the police and prefer charges. I think I will anyway, because if I don't, they'll do nothing."

"They' meaning Benny and Frank?"

"Who else?"

"What about those other two kids, Lennie and Mark? What happened to them?"

"Benny hemmed and hawed and said Frank would take care of them. But that's not my problem. My problem is that this kid has a serious problem with women, and this administration does not see it. And we've got a lot of guys like him. It's a very real thing, and they are blind to it all. They don't even see it as an issue. Kyle has had run-ins with Cindy [Cindy Horne, health teacher] and Deb [Deborah Myers, physical education teacher], too. He doesn't like strong women."

"He'd better learn to; there's going to be a lot more of you out there if we do our job right," Austin sympathized.

"Not if this administration doesn't wake up. Maybe Deb's suit will wake them up. Did you know she filed a complaint with the State Commission Against Discrimination?"

"No, I didn't. When was this?"

"That's right, you started work here last year; she filed the suit, let me see, it was at least the year before and maybe the year before that. Against Benny. You ought to ask her about it."

"I will," pledged Austin. "Listen, take it easy—maybe take a day off or something. Whatever happens, you know I'll be on your side. How about if I stop by your house one day this week after school? I'd like to talk about this whole thing with you. Maybe we can come up with some kind of plan."

"The 'Austin Nickerson Change the World' plan?" she smiled.

"Something like that, I guess."

"Sure. Stop by anytime."

Austin sat back in his chair and let out a long, slow sigh.

Lunchtime

Leyden held his tray in one hand and picked up the napkin someone had left behind. About a week had passed since the incident in his office.

"Is anyone still sitting here?"

"Nope. It's all yours." Tanya Bradford, one of John Adams' two art teachers, slid her coffee cup and paper bag over to give the big man more room at the small table in the corner of the faculty room. Manny Rodriguez, a student teacher in the P.E. department, and Austin nodded hello.

"Maybe you'd better check the seat for booby traps," Tanya smiled. "Deb Myers was just sitting there."

Even Austin smiled. Leyden pulled out his seat and pretended to look it over. "She must not have known I was coming," he jested. He sighed as he sat down. "Irony, I think."

Bradford lifted her eyebrows in query.

"It's ironic that *I* get her M.C.P. award." He looked at the young student teacher, "That's 'Male Chauvinist Pig,' Manny."

"Don't feel bad; she's given it to every guy in the place at one time or another. She's got Simpson wearing the crown, too," observed Bradford. She looked around the room to see if anyone was listening. "She's got a huge chip on her shoulder, and she never lets up."

Austin spoke to Frank Leyden. "Why 'ironic'? You said you thought—"

"—Yeah, ironic, 'cause I've been the one who's been the buffer between her and Benny. Benny's just old-fashioned. He calls women 'girls' and he opens doors and all that."

"He also really believes that men do a better job on discipline—" noted Austin.

"They do," said Tanya. "Guys don't like to take orders from a woman. I know."

"By current standards, Benny gets a low rating in the equity department," said Frank. "But I think it's minor stuff. I don't think he's malicious or anything like that. Anyway, Deb's always coming around with one request after another: 'The lockers aren't as good. The girls don't have a hockey field. The bathroom isn't painted this week.' No matter how much Benny does to accommodate her, she's never satisfied. The latest is we've got to put a wheelchair ramp up to the football field. We just spent umpty thousand on a drainage project out there. And I'm always in the middle," he went on. "I try to point out to her what he's done—starting a volleyball program, hiring of two more women faculty, getting the locker room painted last summer; he's done a lot, you know. But she's always on what he hasn't done."

"She's appointed herself society's lawyer, sort of?" asked Manny.

"Yeah," nodded Bradford, "but she hurts more than she helps by the way she goes about things. There's such a thing as manners, too."

Austin began to feel uncomfortable talking about his colleague behind her back. "She's got a lot of good qualities. There's plenty of kids who'll talk to her who won't even talk to their guidance counselors."

"Sometimes she talks too much," said Frank. "She's got that kid, Jeanne Campbell, all backed up about how sexist John Adams High School is, and she's cruising around the school looking for sexism in every corner. It's like a reformed alcoholic seeing the evils of demon alcohol in a bottle of vanilla extract."

They laughed.

"I wish it were that funny. I'm surprised you'll even let me sit with you," Frank joked wryly. "With word out about the lawsuit her parents are filing, most of the teachers are treating me like a pariah, like it was contagious."

"It's the age of the courts," Manny replied. "You're a nobody unless you've been hauled into court and had your name plastered all over page one."

"Say, while we're on the subject of courts," mentioned Austin, "what's the scoop on Benny and Gwen Frobisher. She says she's filing charges against that kid—"

"—She's another one," interrupted Frank.

"Takes everything too seriously; never relaxes; no sense of humor—know what I mean?" said Tanya.

"Can't deal with guys at all," said Frank.

"She's OK with you guys," Bradford went on, "but she can't deal with the boys in the school. I think she's one of those people who go into teaching for power."

Manny knitted his brows at her, and Bradford explained further. "Some teachers have issues they bring along with them. Family dynamics they had to deal with, or maybe their own high school experiences, whatever. They bring them to the classroom and they cause problems. It's a good idea for a beginning teacher to ask himself why he's getting into teaching. *Really* why, not some b.s. about helping the world or that."

Austin began rethinking the events of the past few days. He wondered if Frank, though overstating his case a bit, might not be right about Myers and Frobisher. Especially if Deb had been inciting Jeanne to adopt a "this place is sexist" attitude. Austin thought to himself, "Leyden's in a spot, now, what with Jeanne's parents getting in on the act."

Almost as if Frank had read his mind, he turned to Austin and said, "You know, I'm going to need you to testify on my behalf. One of the things she's claiming is that I was browbeating her at that meeting. In addition to the claims of what she says I said about rape, now she's added that to the mess. I hope your testimony will at least quell that part of the charge."

The eyes of those at the table were upon him. "Sure, of course," he mumbled.

"Yeah. Well, thanks. I'm in enough trouble without having to worry about that, too." Leyden stood up and left the table abruptly, annoyed at Austin's unenthusiastic response.

"You didn't sound very supportive," said Tanya.

"I just don't know how much my two cents worth will help," he equivocated slightly. Boy, is that an understatement, he thought.

Things were heating up. Simpson had called Frank into his office not long after the office incident, and Jeanne's parents had asked for a preliminary hearing indicating that they were filing a complaint on their daughter's behalf. Austin knew he'd be testifying; in fact, he was surprised he hadn't been called in to see Simpson already. He really didn't know what he'd say, yet. For a guy in Leyden's position, an entry-level administrative po-

sition, this could be bad. It could be a career-ending kind of thing. At the very least, his professional reputation was at stake. Austin hoped it would not degenerate into a witch hunt. "Witch hunt," shuddered Austin, "there's a term filled with horrible male-female history."

"I've Had It Up to Here!"

"Hi, Deb! I was hoping I'd catch you this afternoon."

"Hello, Austin." The physical education teacher smiled. "You know me—busy, busy, busy." She laughed. "So what's up?"

"Is this a good time to talk? I mean, do you have time to . . ."

"It's a good time. I'll just get some of Willy's good coffee."

In the nine years she had been at John Adams, Deb Myers had established herself as an outspoken advocate on feminist issues, often articulating issues needing the faculty's attention. A few saw her as "too intense" and needing to "lighten up" in her straightforward approach, but most supported her and recognized that for her, these issues were terribly important. Only a few female faculty actually shared her view that the school was plagued with sexism.

Austin sought her out a day or two after his lunch conversation with Leyden and Bradford. He felt the need to be able to see things from her perspective.

They sat together in the faculty room. After some talk about the upcoming softball season and other shared interests, Austin broached his subject.

"You've heard about the Jeanne Campbell thing?"

"Sure did. Jeanne came to me and talked about it both before and after."

"I'm glad she talked to you. She sure didn't get what she wanted at the meeting with Frank."

"She told me you guys had ganged up on her."

Austin bristled momentarily. "Well, yes, I suppose she must have felt like that," he conceded. "I really didn't have much to do with it. All I did was hear a rumor at lunch that Frank had said something absolutely unacceptable to a senior girl. I didn't even know Jeanne."

Deb understood Austin's discomfort. "She did say that. I think she understands you aren't really involved."

"That's good. I hope so," Austin said with relief. "Well, anyway, that's one thing I wanted to talk to you about—to let you know what happened, but since Jeanne has talked to you—"

"She has, but I'd like to know what you think that meeting was all about."

"It was very upsetting. Frank seemed defensive. I think it really shook him up to hear what Jeanne had said. I really don't know whether he said anything like that or not. In my opinion, from listening to him at the meeting, I'd have to say I don't think he did. But from what he did say, I could easily see how Jeanne might have taken it differently. It was tense—his trying to explain and Jeanne trying not to cry." Austin tried to sort his thinking from his emotions. "I think, in retrospect, that Jeanne should have had a woman in there with her rather than me. Because of the subject matter, you know?"

Deb nodded. "That would have helped. Maybe."

"She automatically put me on the same side as Frank. I tried to mediate, but I kept ending up feeling like it was two against one. If I felt that way, I can sure see how she must have felt."

"It isn't over. Her mother's in it. Jeanne has accused Frank of browbeating her."

"Oh, boy." Austin shook his head. "I suppose it's a good thing, a healthy thing, that she hasn't dropped the issue. But 'browbeating' her? I don't think so. It was tense and upsetting, but I didn't see any browbeating."

"She might have just felt that way."

"Yes." Austin took a deep breath, remembering he'd had another thing to talk about. "Listen, I heard about your lawsuit against the administration from Gwen Frobisher. Is it something you can tell me about?"

"You *just* heard about it?" Deb seemed incredulous. "I guess I've lived with the whole thing for so long. . . . You know, it occupied my every waking thought for the first year—but that's right, you weren't here then. These legal things drag on forever."

She lifted her head and looked up as she recalled the events. "I filed a sex discrimination suit against the administration; let me see, it was four years ago. I named Benjamin Simpson [principal], Frank Leyden [vice principal], Irwin Lees [superintendent], and John Mastroanni [local teachers association president]."

Austin nodded. "What started the whole thing?"

"Benny was calling us 'girls.' He did it in private conversation, at the faculty meetings, anywhere and everywhere. I initially asked for an apology and a recognition from him that calling female staff 'girls' is unacceptable. He called us 'girls' in writing, in person, over the loudspeaker, and what happened finally—that snapped it—was that at a Tuesday faculty meeting I stood up and said I'd be interested in meeting with any faculty concerned about issues around multicultural—issues of oppression—issues within the building. Wednesday night, the following night, was parent-teacher night, and three or four female teachers were talking about that very issue and Benny walked by and said, 'C'mon girls, put your nametags on.' It was right in the middle of this discussion, which was pretty timely, and I said, 'Women. We're women.' And he said, 'Not to me you're not. And besides, you're supposed to feel better when I call you "girls."' I felt that was a pretty clear statement of his position, so I said, 'Well, we don't feel better.'

"I decided I would file a formal grievance based on his insistence on being demeaning. I went to the union. I wrote up the grievance and what my ex-

pectations were. One of them was that the administration would take a stance and sort of role model for the faculty on that position. I asked for an apology, and the third thing I asked for since it was part of my goals as an instructor that I be working on racism and sexism in the classroom and he was my evaluator, was to have him removed as my evaluator."

"What happened?"

"The union did not represent it. They agreed it was a violation of the contract, because we do have a clause, but they elected to go the informal route, and they asked him for an apology. Benny, when I met with him for my 'one-on-one,' pulled a definition that he carries in his wallet of 'girl: female employee' which is an outdated definition (and sexist) and said 'Ha, I can call you that; this is the definition!' 'Benny,' I said, 'if I came to you as a professional person and said 'I do not like to be called "Jock" because there are connotations to that term that I feel uncomfortable with, you should back off. That word "girl" is very offensive to me.'

"He said, 'Well, you're the only one who feels that way.' I told him that I know for a fact there are other people it bothers. He came back with 'Well, I can call you that because it says it in the dictionary.' By that time I was pretty angry. I said, 'I can't take responsibility for our outdated dictionaries' or something to that effect.

"I then had an informal meeting with the superintendent saying that we needed sensitivity training for administrators, and he made promises he never came through on.

"In April I filed the complaint with the State Commission Against Discrimination."

Austin interrupted, "Did you get much support from the faculty?"

"Verbally, female faculty supported me. The attorney told me it would definitely strengthen my case if other people would come in and testify that it is a sexist environment and so I asked six or seven people. Four people agreed to go down. They testified and the attorney says, 'This is great. This is a lot of solid information. Will any of you sign affidavits?' None of

them would. I remember Gwen saying something like, 'Look, I've got to work with these people.' Basically, I think they all felt that if they got involved in this case it would make their working conditions even worse than they are now—the pits. What it said to me was 'These people are miserable at work; they're so scared, so kowtowed by things as they are that they won't stand up and fight.' And that's a pretty strong statement about the working conditions. Even without the affidavits, the Commission found probable cause that sexism was involved and they took the case.

"They found against the administration in the first round; the administration appealed, and it has gone to a second round."

"Has it done any good so far?" Austin wanted to know.

"Benny's tiptoeing around me now, which makes me think that when it's all done, his attitude may not have changed but his behavior will have. There's an awareness now. I'm a building representative, and at the meeting there's no language that gets out of hand, or if a subject starts to come up, there's a glance, and 'Oh, Deb's here.' It feels awkward to have to be the monitor, but if it has to be—"

"Has anything else changed?"

"I think things have changed; it's been slow; but I still see the situation as one in which the victim is the one who has to speak up, as opposed to those around her . . . for instance, in our P.E. program—and I'm biased of course—there's been a lot of work done. In our elective program now we may still get a class that's predominantly one sex, one student will come to us and say, 'Hey, I'm the only girl in floor hockey' or 'I'm the only boy in badminton,' and we'll say, 'Yeah, so what? Is that the sport you elected? They elected it, too.'

"In the past, when a kid was 'alone' in a section like that we'd get a note from the parents saying, 'I don't want my daughter weight training with the boys,' and it would take a phone conversation and some education on our part. Now the kids will come in first, and we go through the little

game of 'Reassure me that it'- OK.' 'Yeah, it's OK.' 'OK, I'll be the only boy.' 'OK, I'll be the only girl.'

"The physical education staff isn't totally aware of the problem. Like at sign-up time we introduce the sport and tell a little about what you'll have to do. In that introduction, there's space for an instructor to say, 'For those of you who want to look good in your bathing suits . . . ' and right away you'll have only females signing up for that. And it's also the assumption that they'll want to look good in their suits, not get in shape for their sport. In front of seventy-five students that kind of comment has a lot of impact. It's a setback when that happens. And it still happens."

"Do you see a lot to do in the rest of the school?" he asked.

"I sure do. Shop is still predominantly male. I know there was a female who signed up for it, and ended up in home economics automatically. When Benny wanted to know about awards, the home economics teacher wanted to present a male in her sewing class with an award. Benny said 'Let's hold off on that.' He probably thought the kid would be embarrassed.

"Female athletes do not have the credibility that male athletes have, or the recognition. We still have a football rally in the fall, regardless of the win/loss season but there's no acknowledgment of the female sports even if they have a winning season—if they win the whole district. They've gone to states, yet they've never had all academic classes shut down to recognize the team's success the way they do for football. The facilities: we have two baseball diamonds and no softball diamond and that's a violation. Sometimes students who know what I'm about come to me. There was some real outrage recently from some of the senior girls about what they were being asked to read. They asked the English department head why they weren't reading any female authors.

"Athletic directors are predominantly males. I know of one woman who coaches JV baseball. We have one woman coaching lacrosse.

"The kids are getting sexist messages on a daily basis: setting up chairs, job announcements, reactions to discipline, it goes on and on."

"What about intent? Do you think it is intentional or not, all this sexism?" Austin questioned.

"What's happening is that the same things are coming to Benny's desk again and again. If I were in his place, with these things being brought to him as often as they are, I'd be screening things pretty carefully. So, yes, I think it has to be intentional."

"You must feel alone sometimes," Austin ventured.

"Regarding staff relationships? I think there's a . . . I choose to stay pretty isolated on the staff. There's this idea that I'm incredibly radical. I think the idea that things should change or that they could get better if we just took a more equitable look at things is threatening to people. In some ways it's more threatening to women because it means what they may be comfortable with, knowing what their role is, may be challenged. As a result, they don't want to get involved. Instead of looking to themselves and saying 'What can I do to help that?' they look to the person who's trying to initiate something and say 'What's wrong with her?'"

"Maybe it will get better. When the Commission Against Discrimination report comes out, when it's public and people know—they'll see that things can get better, they don't have to get worse."

Deb sighed, "It's hard to get people to see that they have to take a risk, maybe make a confrontation sometimes, to get things done. I've had enough. I'd had it up to here."

Austin wondered if his turn at confrontation was coming. He wondered, too, which side he'd be on. Was there middle ground here?

"No Future for Me Here"

Austin Nickerson reminded himself that he had promised to stop by Gwen's house so he gave her a call. He wanted to find out why Gwen had gotten so extremely upset about the Kyle Laubach encounter. In his own mind, he saw Gwen and Deb as being very different. Where Deb was outspoken and forthright in her feminism, Gwen was usually quiet and reserved in her opinions. Gwen, he observed, wore makeup and dressed in blouses and skirts. Deb avoided traditional, feminine dress. A weight trainer who enjoyed physical exercise, she chose pants and loose shirts.

They sat down, drank tea, and Austin listed while Gwen talked of her unhappiness at the high school. "I'm trying to work through things on my own, but how do I feel? Awful, awful. Half of the despair I feel is due to the decline in the quality of our students in recent years, and half of it is because I work in a backwards, oppressive place: no materials, no support, no interest in issues. It's a grind; we don't have kids. . . . Well, they're like the kids I've got: there's nothing going on."

Austin nodded sympathetically.

"When I started, I had two sections of college prep. I inherited them from a woman who was here before, but who left because she couldn't work with our present chair. Along with them, I had three low-level sections like the ones I have this year. My second year I had good kids, three college prep, but none of the top sections. Then I started getting mostly the low-level sections. Yet I feel my standards are higher. I taught at the university before teaching public school. I had such a bad assignment two years ago that when I showed it to people, they asked if I was being pushed out or what I'd done to make someone mad at me. In the past three years I haven't had a top class assignment.

"After all the work it took me to get here, I can't believe how shabbily I get treated. Our department head, you have to admit it, Austin, he absolutely hates me. He's sixty-two years old and a classic chauvinist but, what the heck, I should be used to it. I ran into the same stuff years ago. After dropping out of real life because of my first marriage, I finally got it to-

gether enough to get into Lennox State following undergraduate work at Syracuse. I went crawling there with two babies, and on welfare. I was divorced."

"Life couldn't have been easy," offered Austin.

"My life was like a Victorian novel, cloth diapers hanging over the tub, and I'm reading middle English. . . . I could not do it. I could not put the time into it. It's very competitive in grad school. Very narcissistic, too. Push yourself into the limelight. In the grad world, it boiled down to brown-nosing. If you had the time to hang around, socialize, and intellectualize with the professors, 'be one of the boys,' you got the good grades, the recommendations and so forth. But if you had kids, you couldn't just hang out with the professors. What can you do when you have to be home to make supper and go to K-Mart on the weekends to buy boots? Seriously, much of the success of those I saw in grad school went to those who could spend the hours being the 'chosen, the gold ones,' those who could spend hours in the grad research library."

"Did that happen in the women's studies courses?" Austin asked.

"Yes, as a matter of fact, I experienced the worst backlash there, where if I wasn't an outspoken feminist I couldn't do well, or as well as others. That's starting to happen in schools with women's studies or women's literature programs. At the same time I was dealing with landlords who said, 'Divorced women will have a lot of men around.' So I had to take to wearing a wedding band when I'd go to look for an apartment.

"Now I find myself working for a department head who's ideas are long, long behind the times. Complete ignorance, closing eyes, refusal to admit—plus Benny Simpson and Superintendent Lees. Those are the people I deal with. I don't think our department is very enlightened. There aren't any decent textbooks or novels in stock in our book room that portray any female protagonists, black writers, people of color. Any attempt to change that has met with resistance from the vice principal, department chair, colleagues. Resistance, like, well, I went to Simpson, and he told me to file a grievance, and I wasn't even tenured yet; I went to Lees, and he told me

to write up a grant, a budget proposal. Simpson gave me new textbooks to review after Deb named him in her suit, but he shelved the work I did. The vice principal, Leyden, had my colleagues in privately and asked them what they thought of my complaint about the textbooks and they said they thought it was baseless. The following year I approached him because he was obviously ignoring me, and he said, 'It was dropped because no one else agreed with you.'

"The developing tension between my chair and me; it became very bad at times and so I am fading into the background. He gets along best with people who are submissive; they chose a very submissive man after they hired me. Lees told the applicant that they would rather have him than me, actually told an applicant that! What gets to me, what still gets to me, is that I'm constantly in a role, playing a certain act that I'm forced into, 'libby bitch,' that I find myself keeping a low profile. So I'm reevaluating. I'm pulling back. As a result, I'm backing off. They get so perturbed; every single one of our colleagues. It taps into their own lack of keeping abreast of things; it's easier for them to say 'she's a whiner' than to do the work that's needed to keep up, finding new titles, authors, new techniques. I've been battering my head against this issue so long, I've begun to question myself. Lack of confidence creeps in. For instance, they don't fool around with Deb Myers too much because she is pushy; I don't have that personality. It makes it harder. We have to be the jerk, you know, to get any response.

"Then the union—it's no help, it's all men—there was, one day there was this poster of a half-nude woman in a very risque bathing suit on the wall advertising to come to The Time Out Bar for a teacher social and Mastroanni said it was just a joke. Deb Myers took it down, and everyone bitched at Deb and called her a hard ass for taking it down. That's so typical, to say something and then to say it's just a joke and why can't you take it as a joke.

"Friends ask me if I will apply for the department chair when our present chair retires next year. I am almost 100% certain I will not apply. I am sure they don't want me. I think they want someone else. I don't want to humiliate myself. I think it's just too sewn up. Lees and Simpson would

never let it happen. I predict I will try to get out of teaching in the next ten years. I like English and I like teaching and I like kids, but I think the system doesn't work. There's too much else being asked from us. Half of me says, 'Yes, go for the job,' but the other half tells me that by now I couldn't be considered in an authority position by the other member of the department because I've had to be the complainer so many times. I believe that I have a lot to offer. I'm maybe not very good at some of the things that department chairs have to be good at—all the b.s., the organization. Some teachers think I'm a space shot because of some styles that are personal to me. But the same people are intimidated by what I know; so they want to get me because I don't know where I left my keys. That's an easy target.

"Maybe I'm abrasive; maybe I take things too personally. How much of what has happened to me in my life has been because of my personality and how much because I am a woman? That's the question. I don't know the answer, but I know that there's no future for me here."

"What Do I Do Next?"

Austin was in a terrible mood. He was irritable and impatient. His grumpiness did not lessen even when he noticed that his students were aware of his emotional state. They tiptoed around him warily and that made him feel guilty which, of course, made him even more touchy. Minor disciplinary events such as running in the hall, use of profane language, and locker-kicking he met with draconian measures. Feeling no control over larger issues, he ruthlessly clamped down on the petty ones. The situation dragged on for days.

Perspective and insight reasserted themselves following an enlightening moment with a coat hanger. The weather had turned sharply cold again just at the moment when everyone had begun to feel spring had arrived for real. Austin lugged his heavy overcoat back into service, and when he reached school, he attempted to hang it on one of the hangers in his room's storage closet. The hanger was no longer up to the task and promptly col-

lapsed and dumped the black coat in the gray dust which had been accumulating to a formidable depth (probably since the school's construction in the late forties). For a few seconds Austin became Conan the Barbarian; the hanger ended up in twisted knots.

Somehow the minor event was cathartic, and Austin felt much, much better—good enough to turn his conscious attention to the two issues that had generated such turbulence in his normally placid teaching demeanor. First, what should he do concerning Jeanne's charges against Frank? What position should he take on the issue of Frank's browbeating Jeanne?

Next he turned his attention to John Adams High School itself. He began to take a hard look at Jeanne's charge that "This school is so sexist." Was she right?

He could easily turn up evidence of differences in the way males and females were treated. But why did these differences exist? Expenditures for boys' sports had outrun similar expenditures for girls' sports by a significant ratio. Women faculty had received lower salary increments than their male counterparts for identical sports with differentials up to \$1,000 per year among female and male basketball coaches until quite recently when the teachers' association finally intervened, led by (ironically, given Deb's charges) the current president, John Mastroanni.

Despite the passage in the early seventies of a state law forbidding discrimination by sex in state schools, students of both sexes were not enrolled in all courses. Even where no administrative prohibition existed, Austin found that shop classes were strictly male and home economics, female. Whose fault was that?

From the guidance department Austin discovered that, although numbers of girls and boys in the graduating classes had been roughly equal for the last several years, only one-third of those going on to enroll in state universities had been women. The girls seemed to have been channeled to state colleges, where they constituted two-thirds of the enrollment—according to the guidance director, who evidently was on top of the issue. The director reported, "You know, Austin, it used to be we'd say to a girl

'nursing or teaching?' and that was it. Times have changed. Still, there aren't many of our young women going into engineering; the math scores aren't there. But there are some. Used to be zero, zip, no way, José."

Austin took a look at the staff of John Adams High School. Of the total personnel, women were a two-thirds majority. Only one woman held an administrative position (department head), and she had been appointed within the last two years. All the clerical workers were women; all the custodians, men. All the cafeteria staff were women except for the director of food services. Austin wondered about the signal the school was sending its students, male and female, with its hiring practices. He also suspected that superintendent Irwin Lees and principal Benny Simpson might have pushed for the one lone recently-appointed female department head simply to cover themselves. Deb Myers' lawsuit might have elbowed some room in Lees' thinking, albeit grudgingly.

"Society at large is sexist," thought Austin. "Fewer than five percent of our nationally elected representatives, senators, and governors are women." Fewer than one-tenth of the doctors, he had learned, were female. He remembered being surprised to learn that two-thirds of the doctors in the Soviet Union were women, until he had also discovered that in the U.S.S.R. medicine is traditionally woman's work.

"What can you do?" he mused. "What if women don't apply for the jobs and men do? Isn't that an indication that we want things that way? Some women eschewed traditional women's dress: nylons, makeup, skirts and dresses, and high-heeled shoes; but wouldn't the Tanya Bradfords of the world also raise Cain if such clothes were suddenly outlawed? When do the differences become a matter of sex and not sexism? Is this school really sexist, or is it a reflection of society at large and the choices that woman themselves make?

Austin went on to consider how many of the issues were in his control. What could he achieve practically? Some things were achievable within the classroom, he believed. Curriculum changes, new books? Maybe. But what about the larger issues? He wanted to turn things around at the school. But what could he really accomplish here?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: GENDER WARS*

The situation at John Adams High School and the attitudes of such characters as Benny Simpson and Deb Myers may seem extreme, even stereotyped. Yet the case is based on an authentic situation and the material comes directly from participant interviews. Real life can present stock situations that a fiction writer could not get away with. The situation at John Adams High School is a familiar one, not only in terms of the gender issues it presents but also in terms of the more general questions it raises. What are a teacher's options in a highly factionalized educational institution? Can a new teacher help to bring about productive institutional change in an organization with a long history of bitter conflict?

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1. Austin Nickerson finds himself in a dilemma partly of his own making. He reported to Vice Principal Frank Leyden a rumor circulating around the school. According to this rumor, Leyden told Jeanne Campbell, a senior student, that girls who get raped "are asking for it" if they dress and behave in certain ways. Leyden immediately called Jeanne Campbell into his office to convince her he said no such thing and asked Nickerson to witness this meeting. The second meeting between Jeanne Campbell and Frank Leyden goes as badly as their first meeting when Jeanne had presented her ideas for the rape awareness workshop. Jeanne Campbell's parents are threatening to bring formal charges against Frank Leyden for browbeating their daughter. Nickerson witnessed this meeting and must make a formal statement about what really went on.

* I am grateful to the students in Education 330, spring of 1990 for suggesting many ideas in these questions. Beth Pierson's analysis of the issues in *Gender Wars* was especially helpful in formulating these questions, and a few of her comments have been incorporated into these questions with her permission.

What is going wrong during this second meeting between Jeanne Campbell and Frank Leyden? In Leyden's view, Jeanne simply misinterpreted what he said during their previous conversation. In his eyes, the problem is convincing Jeanne that her understanding of what he said—or at least what he meant—is incorrect. Does Leyden have the problem right? What would you see as the fundamental problems Leyden should be trying to address in his meeting with Jeanne Campbell?

Consider the meeting from Jeanne's point of view. Tears are running down her cheeks and yet she makes no move to wipe them away. What clue does this give you to the way Jeanne is framing the problem of the meeting? What do you see as Jeanne's motives, emotions, and goals? Should Leyden have been sensitive to the possibility that Jeanne may be pressing for a rape awareness workshop because she herself had been a victim of date rape? How might this possibility have affected the way he should have responded to Jeanne in the first meeting? In the second?

Jeanne has talked to feminist teacher Deb Myers about the first meeting with Leyden. She has told the story to other students, and has enlisted the support of her parents. ("I told my parents about him, and now wait 'til they hear about this! They said they'd get me a lawyer if I needed one.") What is at stake for Jeanne Campbell in this second encounter with the vice principal? Can she afford to back down? Can you suggest any approach Leyden could have used to offer both of them a face-saving way out?

Nickerson is asked only to witness this meeting, but he attempts to play the role of mediator and to move toward reconciliation. Note the counseling techniques he uses, especially the strategies of active listening and reflecting feelings. Nickerson, for example, acknowledges the legitimacy of Jeanne's feelings and actions without acknowledging the validity of her position ("This is very upsetting, Jeanne; it's an upsetting subject. You've done well to bring this up; it's an important issue.") Do you see Nickerson's remarks as supportive and soothing or as paternalistic and patronizing?

If Leyden had used similar counseling techniques earlier in the meeting—perhaps asking Jeanne what she had heard him say at the first meeting, listening carefully to what she said and reflecting it back to her, acknowledging the legitimacy of her feelings while offering an alternative interpretation of his words—do you think Jeanne might have left satisfied? Or was this meeting doomed from the start? What if Leyden had done none of this but simply apologized for the impression he created, even if it was unintended?

Suppose Leyden had not rushed into this meeting with Jeanne Campbell, but instead had thought about developing a strategy for the meeting. If he had come to you as a trusted colleague and asked for your advice, how would you have suggested he structure this meeting? Should he have invited Jeanne's parents? Deb Myers? a female counselor? Where should he have held the meeting? Should he have confronted the rumor directly or dealt with the matter indirectly?

Did this meeting need to have been held at all? John Adams High School is beset by rumor and gossip. Would Leyden have been well advised to ignore the rumor and hope that it would fade away? Leyden had reason to deal with the situation immediately, but holding the meeting also had risks. On balance, do you think Leyden would have done better to ignore the rumor or adopt a wait-and-see strategy? Was he justified in reacting quickly?

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2. In your judgment, did Leyden actually browbeat Jeanne Campbell in this interview? What makes you think so? What features of the meeting made Jeanne think she had been browbeaten? Consider the room arrangements, the physical size and gender of the participants, and their body language.

Nickerson is in a tough spot. In figuring out what testimony he should give about what happened at this meeting, he cannot ignore the fact that a colleague and friend, Frank Leyden, is counting on him to offer favorable testimony and genuinely feels that truthful testimony would be favorable. Nickerson is also a young and untenured teacher, and Leyden will be one of the people making tenure decisions.

Personal friendship and political considerations aside, what testimony do you think Nickerson should give concerning the charge that Leyden browbeat Jeanne Campbell? Given the personal and political aspects of the situation, what do you think Nickerson should say?

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3. What precipitated these difficulties was Austin Nickerson's coming to Frank Leyden with a damaging rumor. In your judgement, was Nickerson's behavior ethical and professional or just another example of the tattling and backbiting so destructive to the educational climate of John Adams High School?

When you hear a rumor that might damage a colleague, should you inform the person? Would you want to be informed yourself? Under what circumstances?

Could Nickerson, a relatively new and untenured teacher, be carrying this rumor to Leyden in an effort to curry favor with the administration? If this is his motive, do you think he will succeed? What risks is Nickerson incurring? Leyden, for example, may believe that Nickerson will also report remarks that Leyden has made. Nickerson is also thrusting himself in the middle of a volatile problem. Leyden comes away annoyed by Nickerson's lack of enthusiastic support. Jeanne comes away feeling that both Nickerson and Leyden "ganged up" on her. Despite these risks, which materialized, was Nickerson ethically right to go to Leyden with a potentially damaging rumor? Should he then have alerted Leyden to her postconference outburst so Leyden could prepare for potential charges?

In any organization, gossip is an important means of informal communication and social control. To take the position that gossiping about other faculty in the school is unprofessional ignores both the inevitability of gossip and its vital functions in sanctioning and controlling behavior. But the gossiping at John Adams High School has reached a damaging level. Is gossiping a central problem at John Adams High School that needs to be controlled or is the gossip symptomatic of more fundamental problems?

What is causing so much tension and strife at John Adams High School? Is gender equity at the center of these conflicts or is the general unhappiness rooted

in other problems? Consider other problems at John Adams High School—the leadership style of the principal, the working relationships among faculty—that may need attention.

*

4. How do you see Deb Myers' role in creating the hostilities between Jeanne Campbell and Frank Leyden? Deb Myers says that "Jeanne came to me and talked about the meeting both before and after." In Frank Leyden's view, Deb Myers "has got that kid, Jeanne Campbell, all backed up about how sexist John Adams High School is, and she's cruising around the school looking for sexism in every corner."

Do you see Deb Myers' efforts to sensitize her students to issues of social justice as educative? Gwen Frobisher, after all, complains that "there's nothing going on" with her students. They are only self-absorbed teenagers. Deb Myers has special rapport with some students, who seek her out rather than the regular guidance counselor. Are Myers' efforts to make students aware of serious social problems, including the problems in their immediate environment, within the professional responsibilities of a teacher? Or do you see Deb Myers as manipulating students and using them as her troops to promote her own issues and fight her own battles? Would your opinion change if the students were of college age?

What are Myers' responsibilities to her colleagues? If Myers indeed labeled Leyden's behavior as "sexist" to Jeanne Campbell, was her behavior unprofessional? Should she have offered Jeanne an alternative interpretation? What if she had said nothing at all when Jeanne came to her and reported what had happened at the meeting with Leyden? Would silence avoid the ethical dilemma or does this alternative lack any real ethical import? How would Jeanne have interpreted Myers' silence?

*

5. Nickerson says that he can "easily turn up evidence of differences in the way males and females were treated." But differences do not equal discrimination. He goes on to ask "why did these differences exist?"

Consider some of the evidence Austin Nickerson reviews:

- Expenditures for boys' sports are substantially greater than expenditures for girls' sports.
- Males and females are not equally represented in all courses. Shop classes, for example, are male-only and home economics classes, female-only.
- While girls and boys graduate in roughly equal numbers, the majority of the girls go on to less prestigious and expensive state colleges whereas the majority of the boys go on to the better state universities.
- While women comprise two-thirds of the teaching staff at John Adams High School, the principal, vice principal, head of the teachers' union, and all but one department head are males.
- The principal, Benny Simpson, asks Gwen Frobisher what "she had said" to Kyle Laubach when Frobisher reports that Kyle had shoved a chair at her. The principal persists in calling women "girls" even though the female faculty tell him that they find the term offensive.
- Boys are playing a game of careening into girls in the halls and trapping them against their lockers while they struggle to get free.

Which of these situations presents evidence of sexist practices at John Adams High School? Which are reflections of sexist attitudes in the general society? Which differences reflect not school or societal discrimination at all but rather result from the free but different choices males and females make?

Is statistical parity in male and female administrators, for example, the appropriate measure of fairness in hiring and promotion practices? Does the fact that more administrators are males in itself indicate a pattern of institutional discrimination or would you need other information? Would a person like Gwen Frobisher, who wants the department head position and believes she is well-qualified for it, bother to apply given her perceptions of the sexist practices at the institution?

What role should the school play in trying to change patterns of sexual discrimination which reflect practices and attitudes in the general society? Should counselors, for example, speak to parents who choose to make greater economic investments in their sons or urge the young women to complain? Should John Adams allocate equal monies for sports when boys' sports draw greater community interest and support than do girls' sports?

Serious efforts to change patterns of gender inequity, especially those rooted in the general society, will require institutional resources. Such resources—time, talent, money, energy, and commitment—are always in short supply. To what extent should schools devote their resources to such social issues? Would society be better served if schools devote their resources to their own unique and vital functions—teaching students to read with understanding, to learn science, mathematics, and history? If teachers' time is taken up by rape awareness workshops, for example, or reviewing textbooks for gender inequity, less time is available for helping students with poor reading skills or nurturing the talents of gifted students.

Or are schools important socializing institutions which drive social change and have a special responsibility for pursuing social justice? Who should decide what issues advance social justice and what issues represent only the particular political passions and fashionable causes of a particular social class?

To place these issues in the context of this case, consider Leyden's and Simpson's response to Jeanne Campbell when she presented her request for a rape awareness workshop. What if Jeanne had requested an antiabortion workshop? Does the nature of the issue and what causes are fashionable determine whether the school should sponsor the activity? Who should make this decision—educators, the school board, a parents' and teachers' group? Do you see teachers as impartial or as representing the world-view of a particular social class?

*

6. Austin Nickerson, a fairly new and untenured teacher, is searching for a "middle ground." On a personal level, he wants to remain friends with both factions, both the feminists and the traditionalists. On an institutional level, he

wants to find a way in which gender issues can be dealt with as one of many valid educational issues contending for attention. Gwen Frobisher jokes about his desire for an "Austin Nickerson Change the World Plan" which, presumably, would not only increase gender equity at John Adams High School but also bring the faculty and administration together into an educational community with common purposes. Nickerson finds himself in the position of many newcomers who enter a highly factionalized organization suffering from a long history of professional and personal animosities. Battle lines have long since hardened and every new issue reopens old wounds and creates opportunities to settle old scores. The standard advice for a newcomer in a factionalized organization is to join a faction, even the weaker one, rather than to stand alone with no allies at all. Should Nickerson heed this warning?

Is Nickerson, in his search for the middle ground, someone you find yourself respecting? Or does he appear weak and cowardly, a Caspar Milquetoast, who is trying to make everybody happy? Would you have more respect for him if he had been more direct with Leyden concerning his perceptions of Leyden's behavior in the interview? When is searching for the middle ground an admirable attempt to develop consensus and when is it weakness, merely an effort to avoid unpleasant confrontation?

If Nickerson is indeed convinced that John Adams High School is a sexist institution, does he not have a professional obligation to exert efforts to bring about change?

What are Nickerson's options?

He could join Deb Myers and lend his support, as a male faculty member, to her fight for gender equity. Deb Myers espouses a clear philosophy: reform requires confrontation. To make the system change, she has to give up the luxury of being comfortable as a member of the group and accept the role of cop and monitor. Do you agree with Myers' view that confrontation is necessary to change or do you see her as a polarizing force and ultimately a negative influence? Do you think that Myers is doing something important? If so, would you yourself be willing to do this work? If not, why not? Is it a matter of personal temperament or a matter of your judgment about what approaches are institutionally productive?

Nickerson could also take Gwen Frobisher's approach and leave John Adams High School. There are many places in which to make a contribution, and he may conclude that John Adams High School, at the present time, is not a place where he can do his best work. Would you censor Nickerson for leaving and consider it a form of cowardice? Or would you consider this decision a wise one? Would you make the same judgment about Frobisher's decision to leave John Adams High School? If not, why not?

Nickerson can also choose to withdraw into his own classroom and fight for gender equity in a domain that he can control. He can alter his own reading list to reflect the contributions of female and minority authors. He can videotape his classroom and monitor his own conduct for unintended sexism. He can create within his English classroom an island of equity and excellence. Does this strategy make sense or would Nickerson be settling for less than he should? As an educator, does he owe it to his students to take a more public stance if he is indeed convinced that sexism is a serious problem in the school and in the society?

What possibilities for institutional change do you see at John Adams High School? The stink of the fish, the saying goes, begins at the top. So long as Benny Simpson is principal of John Adams High School, can anything be done about the institutional problems? Or can Simpson be influenced, as he appears to have been by Deb Myers' sex discrimination suit? What possibilities exist on both the formal organizational levels and on the informal levels to create clear policies, fair ways of resolving conflicts, and mutual faculty support?

Do you see the factionalism at John Adams High School as accidental, a result of the particular personalities within this school, or are these value conflicts rooted in the fundamental structure of American public schools. In the public school, faculty are chosen largely on the basis of such factors as teaching experience and subject matter competence. Both the hiring system and the tenure system result in a faculty of different ages, backgrounds, and educational philosophies. Public schools rarely establish distinctive identities or cohesive educational communities.

Private schools, on the other hand, tend to choose faculty not only on the basis of teaching competence but also on the basis of commitment to a particular educational approach, religious doctrine, or distinctive world-view. "We assume competence," said one private school educator, "We look for faculty who can fit in with what we are and are trying to do." Private schools are more often able to establish a clear identity and draw faculty and students who share similar attitudes and commitments. Can public schools achieve a similar sense of educational community and common purpose or must public institutions consider the development of fair mechanisms for resolving conflicts the best they can achieve? What are the implications for creating powerful educational environments? for creating environments that stimulate students' intellectual development?

Epilogue

Austin Nickerson continued to teach at John Adams High School. Following the office incident and the classroom incident, as it had been related to Austin by his colleague Gwen Frobisher, he readily came to the conclusion that sexism was pervasive at John Adams High School. His awareness was further enhanced by what happened as a result of both incidents.

The parents of Jeanne Campbell complained to the principal of John Adams, Benjamin Simpson, that the vice principal, Frank Leyden, had browbeaten their daughter in his office. Austin Nickerson was summoned by Simpson to meet the parents and to explain what had happened. Austin made the following statement:

I know how upsetting this all is to you, and especially to you, Jeanne. I do not believe that Mr. Leyden browbeat you, despite how disturbed you were by the meeting. I think he was upset very much as you were by the whole affair, and I think he wanted—and still wants—you to believe him that he never meant to imply any of the things you inferred in your first meeting with him. I do think Mr. Leyden and I made a mistake in not having a woman present because of the sensitive subject matter. This issue tended to polarize us as male versus female, and I think that's why you feel as if you were browbeaten. I understand that the rape awareness workshop you originally suggested is going to happen in the next couple of weeks. That's great, and it's entirely due to your effort. I hope our next meeting will be under much more pleasant circumstances.

Based on the statement of Austin Nickerson, the Campbells dropped their complaint against Frank Leyden. They seconded Leyden's suggestion that the school create policy governing complaints to the administration concerning sex issues. Simpson indicated at the meeting that he would see to it that the discipline committee undertook that task; however, no policy

has yet been written, nor did Austin Nickerson follow up on Simpson's promise to ensure that it was carried out. Leyden found himself swamped with other duties and was unable to be sure the policy was written.

The rape awareness workshop was a huge success, with high parent involvement. However, only two teachers attended the workshop, and no administrators. Many parents suggested it be expanded to be a regular part of the health curriculum and offered to all grades, not just to seniors. Cindy Horne stepped forward from the faculty to assume responsibility for the continuance of the project.

Sometime later that year, when a colleague of Austin's found a boy holding a girl by her hair up against a locker, he took the students to Benny Simpson. The boy argued, "I can treat her like that if I want to. She's my girlfriend." According to the teacher, the principal responded, "Are you married to her?"

The administration, Simpson in particular, refused at first to give credence to Gwen Frobisher's complaint concerning Kyle Laubach, Len Weintraub, and Mark Howe. Gwen tried to file assault charges against Kyle at the local police station, but was told she would have to go directly to court to ask for a restraining order if she wanted the police to keep the student out of her classroom. At that point the administration elected to respond by calling in the school psychiatrist and the guidance department. With the parents, Simpson outlined a plan for home study for Kyle. Because they were concerned about the number of Kyle's discipline problems, his parents agreed to the plan. Kyle told his parents that Gwen Frobisher had pushed him, so they filed countercharges against her. The judge threw both cases out of court, but not without first calling Benny Simpson on the carpet for failing to deal with the problem in school. In the judge's words, "It is the responsibility of the administration to support the teacher in exercising control of the classroom and maintaining good discipline in the schools. It is not feasible for the court to assume this responsibility."

Gwen asked for and received a leave of absence for the following year, clearly indicating to friends and supporters that she would be looking for

other work during the time off. She expressed her strong unwillingness to return to John Adams.

In the fall Austin returned to work after a summer of curriculum work with his new department head, a male. The school system had received twenty-seven applications for the position, and roughly half had been from females. Simpson chose to interview twelve, including four women. When the selection committee (three men and two women) forwarded three names to the superintendent for consideration, all three were males.

Two first-year teachers did not return that fall. Although they were recommended by their department heads for retention, Simpson and Leyden vetoed the teachers' candidacy on the grounds that they failed to maintain proper discipline in their classrooms. They based their arguments largely on the number of students the teachers had sent to the office over the course of the year. Both teachers were women, one in art and one in health science.

Also in the next school year Austin found himself beginning to wonder if perhaps he might inadvertently be doing things in his classroom that were sexist or were based on sexist assumptions. He asked a coworker to videotape his classroom during the same class period on each of five successive Tuesdays. He watched the videos repeatedly using a checklist of his own devising for assessing sex bias. He also undertook to review the materials he was using in his classes, analyzing the material for sex and race bias, and grouping the materials as biased, fair, or affirmative. He continued having difficulty finding any middle ground on the issues and was dismayed at how the subject of sexism continued to polarize the faculty.

More and more frequently he noticed inequities around the school and mentioned them to Deb Myers. Some she dealt with, some she didn't.

EXERCISE 1

Choosing Literature:

An Analysis of Austin Nickerson's Book List

We will be reading the following works this year. Some of you may wish to purchase your own copies. I have notified the John Adams High School Bookstore, and they assure me they will have a few extra copies of each title in stock.

White, T. H. *The Once and Future King*

Malory, Sir Thomas. *Le Morte D'Arthur*

Shakespeare, William. *Romeo and Juliet*

Dickens, Charles. *Great Expectations*

Remarque, Erich. *All Quiet on the Western Front*

Steinbeck, John. *The Moon is Down*

Paton, Alan. *Cry, the Beloved Country*

Cather, Willa. *My Antonia*

Shakespeare, William. *The Merchant of Venice*

Twain, Mark. *Tom Sawyer*

In addition, we will be reading some short stories and poetry from various anthologies which the English department will provide.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is the book list for sophomore English in the college preparatory program at John Adams High School, a large secondary school in a metropolitan area. Decisions about what books go on the reading list are made by the English faculty. At the end of each school year, the English faculty meet to review the book list and revise it. Although teachers may add selections to this list, they are expected to cover the required books, which are difficult to complete during the academic year.

1. Only one book on this list was written by a woman and none were written by minorities. Do these characteristics in and of themselves invalidate the book list? If so, why? In making your argument, consider the *criteria* for choosing works of literature for high school students, the specific purposes of literature courses, and your broader purposes in educating male and female students.

A fundamental purpose of an English course, for example, might be to develop in students the ability to read important works of literature that are not easily accessible with understanding and appreciation. Another purpose might be to develop students' sense of writing style, their understanding of the intricacies of complicated writing, and their ability to write well themselves. A literature course might emphasize the development of taste and the refinement of taste. It might have as a goal the development of students' ability to read on their own literary works that are more than simple narratives.

In selecting works of literature, faculty might emphasize books with characters, themes, and scenes (e.g., "Big Brother" in *1984* or the whitewashing the fence scene in *Tom Sawyer*) that have become part of the common literate culture and are often alluded to in contemporary journalism and other writing. A literature course might emphasize literature that is of great social or historical importance or that has influenced the development of literary traditions. A course might emphasize literature that offers students insight into the human heart and spirit, that portrays the complexities of human passion and courage,

that offers vicarious experience with historical periods and ways of life very different from their own, or that offers special insight into their own times.

You might also want to select female and minority writers to emphasize to students that good writing is not the exclusive province of white males. But, beyond this obvious reason for their inclusion in a reading list, what other purposes might you have? Is literature written by women, for example, necessary to acquaint male students with the particular problems and perspectives of women? Could a male author offer such insight as well as a female author? How do you balance all these considerations in coming up with a reading list? Are you in favor of a reading list based on the principle of "proportional representation" of authors by race and gender? What principles would you advocate?

2. These classics, all written by women, are being considered as additions to the John Adams High School sophomore reading list. Which might you add to the reading list and why? Justify your choices in terms of your educational purposes and criteria for selecting literature.

- Anne Frank's *Diary of Anne Frank* is a first-person narrative by a Jewish girl whose family is in hiding from the Nazis. The family is discovered and Anne dies in a concentration camp.
- Emily Brönte's *Wuthering Heights* is a story of passion, revenge, and ambition, that traces the influence of the wild Heathcliff on two Yorkshire families at the end of the eighteenth century. *Wuthering Heights* is considered one of the greatest novels in the English language.
- Charlotte Brönte's *Jane Eyre* is a first-person narrative of an intelligent, sensitive woman who falls passionately in love with her employer but renounces him in response to her principles and desire to maintain her own dignity and self-respect. The novel inaugurated the literary tradition of the introspective psychological novel.
- Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* is a first-person narrative written by a spirited girl growing up in a racist Southern town. Her father, a

lawyer, defends a black man accused of raping a white girl, and she and her brother are subjected to abuse.

- Margaret Craven's *I Heard the Owl Call My Name* is the story of a young priest who does not know he has less than three years to live and is sent by his Bishop to spend those years in a Northwest Indian village where he learns about love, dignity, and courage.

3. If you argue that the John Adams High School book list is "biased," in what does this bias lie? Does "bias" lie only in the authorship of the books? Does it also lie in the way women and minorities are portrayed in the books?

In *Tom Sawyer*, for example, Mark Twain portrays the hero, Tom, as strong, active, and ingenious and his friend, Becky, as weak, passive, and dependent. When both Tom and Becky are trapped in the cave Becky cries and waits for death while Tom pushes on and finds his way out of the cave:

[Tom] proposed to explore another passage. He felt willing to risk Injun Joe and all other terrors. But Becky was very weak. She had sunk into a dreary apathy and would not be roused. She said she would wait, now, where she was, and die—it would not take long. She told Tom to go with the kite-line and explore if he chose; but she implored him to come back every little while and speak to her; and she made him promise that when the awful time came, he would stay by her and hold her hand until all was over.

Should *Tom Sawyer* be characterized as "biased" and removed from the book list? If *Tom Sawyer* is taught, should a teacher discuss directly the issue of "gender portrayal" in the book? Suppose the book in question was Helen Keller's *Story of My Life*. Should a teacher also make the point that boys with similar handicaps could also be courageous? If you think that the teacher should make this point in the case of *Tom Sawyer* but not in the case of Helen Keller, why do you think so?

4. In an English faculty discussion, Austin Nickerson proposed adding *The Good Earth* by Pearl S. Buck to the reading list. Pearl S. Buck won the Pulitzer Prize for *The Good Earth* and also received the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Gwen Frobisher violently disagreed with this proposed addition because Chinese women were portrayed in *The Good Earth* as chattels of their husbands who beat them.

This portrayal of women, Austin Nickerson responded, was an accurate depiction of agrarian Chinese life in the 1930s, the Old China of the Manchu Dynasty before the Revolution. Further, the central female character of the case, O-Lan, displays power and strength by holding the family together in times of famine and adversity.

Gwen Frobisher was not swayed. Literature, she argued, serves a moral purpose. Books, just like film and television, present influential models of male and female roles. At John Adams High School, both female and male students should read literature which portrays women in the same kinds of active, assertive, powerful roles that men hold. It is pure sophistry to argue that such a Chinese woman as O-Lan displays "a kind of strength."

What position would you take in this debate and what other points might you make? Would you add *The Good Earth* to the John Adams High School reading list?

5. Should the feminist critique of reading lists and textbooks which do not portray women in powerful and assertive roles be viewed as a long overdue reform of an oppressive patriarchal system or as little more than a new form of censorship?

Robert Lenner and Stanley Rothman in "Newspeak, Feminist-Style" (*Commentary*, 1990, 54-56) argue:

Although professionals in the field of education have fought ferociously against efforts by conservatives or traditionalists to censor textbooks and other curricular materials, their response to similar campaigns by feminists has generally been one of eager acquiescence. . . . California . . . establishes the following guidelines for review of textbooks:

- (1) illustrations must contain approximately equal proportions of men and women; (2) in the representation of each profession, including parent,

men and women must be shown in equal numbers; (3) the contributions of men and women to developments in history or achievements in art or science must appear in equal numbers; (4) mentally and physically active, creative, problem-solving roles, and success or failure in these roles, must be divided evenly between males and females; (5) the number of traditional and non-traditional activities engaged in by characters of both sexes must be approximately even; (6) the gamut of emotions must occur randomly among characters, regardless of gender; and (7) both sexes must be portrayed in nurturing roles with their families.

How would the application of these California guidelines to the John Adams High School sophomore reading list affect the books selected? Should the guidelines for reviewing literature be different from the guidelines for reviewing textbooks? What effects will such guidelines have? Do you view such guidelines as serving the goals of indoctrination or liberation?

EXERCISE 2

Gender Bias in Classroom Life:

Inside Austin's Classroom

Worried about whether he himself treated male and female students equitably, Austin Nickerson asked a colleague to videotape his classroom. The classroom scene that follows portrays one of these videotaped class periods, modified to include Nickerson's thoughts, interpretations, and explanations of classroom routines.

1. Read through this scene and make your own judgments about whether Austin Nickerson is responding inequitably to male and female students. Identify any specific instances of gender bias you may find.
2. Read through this scene again, using the assessment tool that Nickerson developed after attending a workshop on gender equity at a professional meeting. Do you think that this tool is a reasonable way to examine gender inequity or is the problem more subtle? How would you evaluate Austin Nickerson's classroom using this tool?

* * *

"Hiya, Mr. Nick," Stuart's face always had a grin. His short hair, spiked up in front, gave him an impish look which belied his considerable academic ability.

"Hi, Stuart. What about those Bullets, eh?" he shook his head in feigned dismay.

"Too many injuries. They'll never make it this year. Do we need our vocab workbooks?"

"Not today. Writing groups today."

Stuart pushed past Austin, who stood half in the hallway, half in his doorway, as was his custom, to greet each student.

"Hello, Rosa," he nodded his welcome. "How's it going?"

"Hello, Mr. Nickerson. Pretty good." The shy girl always carried her books in front of her, her arms folded around them. Austin remembered reading somewhere that carrying books that way was less of a strain on the back, but it didn't seem to be doing her posture much good.

Next, Rich came barreling down the hall. "Hey, Mr. Nick, what's up?"

"Lo, Rich. Hey, give Stuart a hand with the desks, will you. Writing groups."

"Kay. Hey, Mr. Nick—guess what—Marcia and I got As on the biology test. Man, I'm awesome." Austin smiled.

Joan and Marcia arrived together. It appeared to Austin that they were laughing about some secret.

"What are you two up to?"

Joan smiled, "Oh, hello, Mr. Nickerson. We were just—" They looked at each other and burst out laughing again.

"I see," said Austin, mock seriously. "It's going to be a long class, is that what you're trying to tell me?"

"Yup," she replied quickly. "We want to have a class party for Valentine's, can we?"

"We'll see . . ."

"Aw, come on, Mr. Nickerson. My dad always says that when he means 'no.' We didn't have a Christmas party."

"I don't have time to plan it. Will you two make all the arrangements?"

"Of course!"

"By the way, Marcia, Rick says you also got an A on your bio test. Nice going."

She looked pleased. "Just lucky, I guess."

Roger Hart moved down the hall toward his room looking for all the world like some eighteenth century military officer, erect, chin up, and "in control." Kids teased him about being the next Donald Trump. "I know there's more to life than money," he'd joke back. "There's *more* money."

"Good morning, Mr. Nickerson," he intoned.

"Good morning, Mr. Hart," Austin formally replied.

"Writing groups, I see."

"Yes, Mr. Hart," Austin role-played.

It was Austin's favorite class. He felt totally at ease with every student, and he had established some basis for a personal exchange with each one. They were highly motivated learners, much different from the sections he'd been assigned the year before. Last year, his prep time had been given over to devising various ways to gradually shift from extrinsic motivators which were all provided by him to more intrinsic elements. He felt he'd had some success, too, but this year he spent his time scrambling for material to offer. This group, which consisted of sophomores taking an honors English course, was voracious in devouring new information. They especially enjoyed the difficult discussions he arranged prior to his essay writing assignments.

Wendy arrived. She was a strikingly beautiful girl, thought Austin, and very smart; she seemed almost disappointed when the class did not offer some task which called for higher level thinking skills.¹ She reacted with

¹"Higher level thinking skills" refers to Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, which arranges cognitive thinking skills from the lowest, "knowledge," up through the higher levels, "comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis," to the highest, "evaluation."

visible appreciation when class discussion unearthed some interpretation, some view which she herself had not reached.

"Hello, Mr. Nickerson."

"Come on in, Wendy." Austin's eyes quickly looked away from her. Subconsciously perhaps, he did not want to seem to stare at her.

He had, earlier in the year, tried to interest her in running for class election. She had declined, Austin remembered, because she felt her friends would think she was being pushy and egotistic. "You have to get up in front of everyone at lunchtime in the cafeteria," she had stated, "and practically shout at them to give your speech." Austin regretted that she chose not to run because he felt she had great potential.

When he had greeted the rest of the small class, he closed the door loudly, providing a nonverbal cue that the class recognized without surprise.

"Homework assignment pads," he boomed as he strode to his desk and glanced down at his plan. The bell had not yet rung to begin the class, but the students were quickly fumbling for pens and paper. He glanced around the class quickly, noting that Bob had once again failed to bring in a pad. Bob, too, noticed that he had noticed, and grinned sheepishly.

Austin made a wry face.

"For tomorrow, items 1 to 20 on page 34 of the vocab workbook, and a rough draft for an essay on moral turpitude." The sidelong glances ended the scribbling. "Mor-al tur-pi-tude," he sounded out slowly. "Today finish editing the book reviews for each writer. Tomorrow, we will go to the computer room to type them up, and they will be turned in at the end of the period. Your grade will consist of two parts: one part for what you say, and one part for the editing. The editing grade will be the same for all members of the writing groups. So take a good, hard look at each others' papers. Hang together, or—"

Stuart finished it, "—we all hang separately." Within a minute, each student was looking intently at a paper written by another. Austin used the

time to take attendance. When he finished, he moved out to the first group on his right, three boys (a fourth boy was absent).

"What's this word, Mr. Nick?"

"Ask the author."

"Does he have to have a comma here?"

"Check number eleven."²

"Eleven is 'comma of the appositive,'" said Stuart. "You hafta have a comma before and after it." He leaned over to look at the paper.

"How'dja know that?" Rich was incredulous.

"I used to make the same mistake all the time, right, Mr. Nick?"

"Used to?" Austin looked over the top of his glasses.

"Hey, them's fightin' words," smiled Stuart.

Rick jested, "You're shut, Stuart."

Stuart mocked a boxer's quick flurry of punches. "I'll take him out in the thoid."

"Good plan, Stuart. But it's already the fourth," laughed Austin.

He moved to the next group in the back corner of the room. Three girls and one boy sat reading silently.

"This is a really good paper, Mr. Nickerson," volunteered Bob, whom Austin found to be quiet and somewhat shy.

"Whose is it?" Both Wendy and Rosa sat in the group.

²Austin uses a system whereby common writing problems are assigned a number and recorded in student notebooks as they are discussed in class. When a problem occurs in the writing, Austin refers to the number—forcing the student to reread the rule and examples and then apply the information to the text being edited.

"Rosa's."

Austin nodded. "Rosa does consistently good work. May I take a look?"

"It's not finished, Mr. Nickerson," ventured Rosa. "I haven't got an ending." She gestured that he could see the draft, and the other student passed it to him.

"You read Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*?"

"It was really good."

"I never read it. What's it about?"

"It's," she faltered, "it's kind of complicated."

"Do you think I'd like it?"

"Oh, yes. It's really good."

"Thanks for the recommendation." He read quickly through her first paragraph. "Sounds interesting. Which review did you use as a model?"

"I used this one, from *The New York Times Book Review*. It's by Adrienne Rich." From the way she said the name, he inferred that she expected him to respond to it. He knew of Rich, but had not yet read anything by her. Like many English teachers, he found it nearly impossible to keep up with current literature; the necessity of reading and rereading course works obviated the luxury. He chose to bluff it out.

"The poet, eh? I wonder why they asked her to do the review; Atwood's novel—is it somehow a poetic piece?"

"Well, no. It's more—I mean, they chose her probably because of her views—you know, concerning women's rights and all."

"I see," nodded the teacher, handing back the paper. Wendy watched him speculatively.

He moved to the group of girls by the bulletin board: Joan, Marcia, and their ebullient friend, Cissy. The students had put up the display on the wall themselves. He had arranged for computer room time so that the class could print out a time line featuring famous writers and historical figures. He had used the project as an introduction to the formal research paper they would be assigned later in the year, assigning short research subjects to class members. At this point in the year, he had pictures and reports surrounding a time line of the Men of the Shakespearean Era, from Sir Thomas More and da Vinci to Cromwell and Milton. The investigations had been largely student-centered, with questions about the period focusing on the arts and daily life of the era.

"Mr. Nickerson, may I have a pass to the library? I need to return this book."

He turned to Joan. "Sure, and if you wouldn't mind, would you take this one back for me?" He reached for the book on the edge of his desk.

"OK."

He scribbled out a pass and then turned his attention to the rest of the class. "OK, guys, it's time to wrap up work on the reviews—"

"Mr. Nickerson, you never got to our group," complained Obie. His partners, Ted and the outgoing Annie, silenced him quickly.

"Obie," complained Annie, "we're not far enough along—"

"You just forgot your paper—"

"We didn't have time—"

"You'll have more time for them tomorrow. If you'll look at your assignment pads for tomorrow, you can see how you did on the spelling of 'turpitude.' During the last thirty minutes of this class I want you to examine the behavior of the characters in the section of *Morte d'Arthur* in which Lancelot is surprised in Guinevere's bedchamber. List all the characters involved in order of their moral turpitude, T-U-R-P-I-T-U-D-E."

"Yeah!" cheered Stuart, indicating he had guessed correctly on the spelling. Austin glanced in his direction and raised his eyebrows in approval.

"You may work in class discussion, if you wish. Does anyone want to be chairman?"

Obie raised his hand quickly.

"Fine, Obie, please keep a speaking order and remember to poll the group before you decide on your answer."

Rosa spoke up, "Mr. Nickerson, do you want individual answers or one answer from the group?"

"Individual, thank you for asking, you may never be able to agree as a group."

"What's 'turpitude'?" called Rich.

"Good starting question, Rich. Way to go. Check the handy pocket dictionary," he indicated the tome on the windowsill, *Webster's Third*.

The remainder of the class pushed their seats together into a rather amorphous semicircle.

Obie took out a sheet of paper. "Who wants to go first?"

Annie raised her hand. Obie nodded to her and put her name down.

"What does 'turpitude' mean?"

Obie rolled his eyes and swiveled in his seat toward Rich.

"Inherent baseness, depravity, moral depravity, a base act," Rich called out.

"Like I said," joked Annie, "what's 'turpitude'?"

"Use the speaking order," admonished Austin.

Annie feigned contrition. Wendy raised her hand, and Obie acknowledged her.

"I think it means 'evil.' Like, how evil something is."

"Ah'm bad, ah'm bad, ah'm bad," sang Pat.

Two more hands went up, then a third. Obie wrote quickly and spoke.

"Roger first."

"I had my hand up first," Annie hissed.

"Well, put it where someone can see it next time."

"Just because I don't—"

"Annie, use the speaking order, please," Austin interrupted.

Roger cleared his throat. "As I see it, we're to put the characters in order of 'badness.' Is that right?" He looked around.

Pat shot his arm up, "Ooh!"

Obie looked at him expectantly, then down at his list. "Jean?"

Annie gave him a dirty look.

"Isn't Lancelot the worst of them, since he has pledged himself to the king?"

"Annie?"

"I bet this is the first half. We'll have to do this for *Once and Future King*, won't we?"

Austin ignored the question.

Obie motioned to Marcia.

"I think it's Guinevere. She's the one who betrays her husband."

The discussion was off and running. Austin went to his desk to check his plan book. Perhaps Obie would need a reminder to poll the group, perhaps not. He'd stop the class just before the end of the period to give them the specifics on the essay assignment, but in all likelihood, he would not need to intervene again. His mind turned back to the incident with Jeanne. He looked at his discussion and watched it from the point of her charge that "the school was sexist." Was there anything sexist about his class? He watched for several minutes. The boys seemed to participate more, but what could he do about that? They were always like that. The opportunity to speak was there, and that was equitable. Besides, maybe the girls just didn't want to be aggressive and argumentative. Should they be forced to?

**Austin Nickerson's Assessment Tool for
Assessing Bias in the Classroom**

Verbal and Nonverbal Behavior
Am I interacting with my students
equitably regarding

- how often I call on them?
- how often I praise them?
- the kinds of behaviors I encourage/discourage?
- the kinds of disciplinary measures I employ?
- maintaining eye contact?
- proximity?
- smiling?

Standards and Expectations
Do I treat my students equitably re-
garding

- standards for dress and appearance?
- application of rules and privileges?
- soliciting assistance?
- expectations for academic performance?
- delegation of responsibilities?

Classroom Environment
Do I avoid bias in the classroom
environment

- through depiction or displays?
- through materials?
- through avoiding stereotypical descriptions?
- in seating or grouping?

Language

Is my language free of bias regarding

- my use of male terms to refer to all people?
- my use/condoning of derogatory terminology?
- the word order which consistently places males first?

**Compensatory and Challenging
Instruction**

Do I provide the same quality
instruction for females and males?

- compensatory instruction
- intellectual challenge

Discussion Questions

1. As you read through this classroom scene using Nickerson's assessment tool, you may spot some obvious instances of gender inequity. Others are debatable. Austin's room, for example, features a bulletin board display on "Men of the Shakespearean Era." Few would quarrel with the point that this display is gratuitously offensive in ignoring the importance of women. What might you suggest to replace it? Did any women actually play prominent roles in this historical period? Who was the ruler of England?

While the blackboard display is a relatively clear-cut example, how would you evaluate Austin's use of the term "guys" to refer to his students? In common usage, does the word "guys" refer to males or does it have a more inclusive meaning of "people in general." Check the dictionary, but keep in mind that the issue is not the dictionary definition so much as the way people actually use this word. How do you think Austin's high school students interpret the word "guys"?

2. The assessment tool that Austin Nickerson devised to analyze gender inequities in his classroom misses a critical feature of the problem. The focus of this assessment tool is the teacher and what he or she does or does not do—praise students equally, correct students equally, hold similar standards and expectations, and so forth.

But teachers do not only act. They also react. In this classroom, the boys and the girls are behaving differently and their differences in behavior call forth different responses on the part of the teacher. Notice the diffident manner of many of the girls in Nickerson's class compared to the assertiveness of many of the boys. Rich, for example, brags about his A in biology while Marcia does not mention it. Rich takes full credit for the A ("Man, I'm awesome") while Marcia does not want to seem egotistical ("Just lucky I guess").

In observing his writing groups, Nickerson notes that that the boys are talking and arguing more than the girls. These styles of communication are rooted in

the ways girls and boys have been socialized by parents and other influences long before they arrived in his classroom. Should Nickerson try to change these "natural" styles of interaction and could he do so, even if he tried?

Austin, for example, might insist that the student leading each writing group call on every member of the group in turn rather than allow spontaneous discussion. He might grade students on class participation in order to pressure the girls to participate more. Do you approve of these tactics or do you see them as unfair or undermining other educational purposes, such as creating an easy and relaxed discussion atmosphere? Which goal is more important? Could both goals be pursued through some other approach?

On the other hand, what harm might Nickerson be doing by allowing the pattern of greater male participation and argumentation to persist? If women are to assume important roles in public life or in professions such as law or administration, do they not have to learn to argue aggressively? Would you consider it a valid educational purpose for Nickerson to insist that all students—including women—learn to argue aggressively in a class discussion? Or would you see such a goal as one more instance of men imposing male styles of behavior and male ideals on women?

Similarly, how far should Nickerson go in urging such girls as Wendy to run for class office? Wendy declined because she thought her friends would think her pushy and because she had to get up in front of everyone and "practically shout at them to give your speech." Should Nickerson have let the matter drop, respecting Wendy's decision? Should he have created public speaking assignments in his English class that would have given Wendy and other students practice in formal speaking roles and removed some of their apprehension? How would Wendy have reacted to a Nickerson who did not let the matter drop?

3. Nickerson sees himself as having created "equal opportunity" for both girls and boys to speak in his classroom. Has he actually done so or is he actually, in subtle ways, undermining a climate of "equal opportunity"?

In an important article, "Sexism in the Classroom: From Grade School to Graduate School," Myra Sadker and David Sadker (1986) summarize their research on patterns of classroom interaction in elementary and secondary schools and in colleges. They conclude:

1. Male students receive more attention from teachers and are given more time to talk in classrooms.
2. Educators are generally unaware of the presence or the impact of this bias. (Sadker, 1986, p. 512)

In explaining why these patterns occur, Sadker and Sadker point out that classrooms tend to segregate themselves into boys' sections and girls' sections and teachers gravitate to the boys' sections.

Boys also use call-outs to demand attention:

Our research shows that boys in elementary and secondary schools are eight times as likely as girls to call out and demand a teacher's attention. However this is not the whole story; teachers behave differently depending on whether the student calling out is a boy or a girl. When boys call out, teachers tend to accept their answers. When girls call out, teachers remediate their behavior and advise them to raise their hands. Boys are being trained to be assertive; girls are being trained to be passive spectators relegated to the sidelines of classroom discussion. (Sadker, 1986, p. 513)

Have boys and girls separated themselves in Austin Nickerson's classroom? Does Nickerson indeed spend more time with male groups? How does Nickerson respond to call-outs?

4. If you see Nickerson as giving more attention to boys, what else accounts for this difference? Fred Erickson (1982) uses the concept "co-membership" to point out that teachers and counselors establish a warmer relationship with certain kinds of students based on common experiences, such as having played the same sport or having come from the same part of the country. Examine the quality of interaction Austin Nickerson has with students from the perspective

of co-membership in a male cultural and speech community. Before class, for example, Nickerson positions himself at the door in order to greet each student in a personal way and establish rapport.

Yet, the quality of his interaction with male and female students is quite different. Somehow he gets into the position of building up the male students—as in his teasing role play with “Mr. Hart,” the “new Donald Trump.” When he talks with Joan and Marcia, however, they fall into a role-play of “wheedling a favor from Daddy.” Why does this occur? How else could Nickerson have handled the girls to avoid lapsing into these cultural stereotyped role plays?

Consider as well the sexual tensions in relationships between teachers and adolescent males and females. Could Nickerson's sexual feelings and worries about maintaining a professional demeanor be having an influence? Would the same problems occur if the teacher were female?

5. How do you evaluate Nickerson's classroom from the perspective of enhancing the intellectual development of both boys and girls? Even though boys and girls are sitting in the same classroom, they may be experiencing very different types of educational environments. When males make a comment, Sadker and Sadker's research shows, teachers are more likely to respond with specific praise or criticism. Teachers are more likely to respond critically, for example, to male students' ideas and help them improve upon them. Girls receive more than their fair share of bland comments such as “okay” or “unhuh.”

Notice the way these patterns have been established in Nickerson's classroom. How could Nickerson have responded to Rosa when she brought up *The New York Times Book Review* by Adrienne Rich? Notice that Rosa herself tries to deflect Nickerson's efforts to press her for further explanation.

When male students ask questions, Nickerson constantly demands independent problem solving. One way he communicates these demands is through joking. Nickerson and the boys engage in a pattern of verbal exchange—joking and snappy comebacks—that is characteristic of male communication styles. Women, studies show, rarely learn to joke and participate in such duels of wit (Coser, 1959, 1960).

Why does this occur? What functions is such joking serving in Austin's classroom and what functions does joking generally serve in professional and business life?

Is Nickerson suppressing young women's efforts at joking when they do occur while engaging in verbal duels with young men? Notice how he responds to Annie's one-liner about moral turpitude. Should Nickerson directly teach young women (and young men) to engage in duels of wit in his English class? If so, how should he do this?

6. The communication styles typical of women can be important barriers to their advancement. Studies of group interaction show that men talk more than women, more often become the group leaders, and are more successful at getting the group to accept their ideas (Thorne & Henley, 1975). Men also interrupt women more and thus establish their dominance in the group. When men are interrupted, they are more likely to call attention to the inappropriateness of the interruption and refuse to yield the floor ("Let me finish!"). When women are interrupted, they typically do not make efforts to hold the floor and are quiet for a long time after the interruption.

Have such patterns already developed in Nickerson's writing groups? Nickerson may indeed have provided equality of opportunity for men and women to speak. But he is unlikely to achieve "equality of outcomes" if natural events are allowed to run their course. Should he try to change these patterns? What do you think would happen if he took a direct approach, discussed the research on gender differences in communication style with his students, and solicited their help in devising ways to change these patterns in his class?

Should Nickerson use a more indirect approach? How might he alter his classroom purposes, assignments, and small group routines to achieve "equality of outcomes"?

7. Training programs which discuss the research on gender equity in the classroom, videotaping teachers' classrooms to give them feedback on their own practice, and showing teachers how to respond to students in more equitable

ways have had positive results. Teachers are often stunned to see how prevalent these problems are in their own classrooms. One teacher, who was an active member of the National Organization for Women (NOW), Sadker and Sadker point out, did not believe that an activist such as herself could be discriminating against girls and was stunned to see the bias in her videotape.

Do you think that a staff development program on gender equity in the classroom would be useful in breaking the stalemate that has occurred at John Adams High School? Should Austin Nickerson take the lead, talk about what he has seen in his own classroom, and broach this idea? Should he approach the administration first or should he start by trying to develop support among the teachers? Other faculty may see Nickerson as a new, untenured teacher who is overstepping. Simpson and Leyden may see him as a troublemaker or as a member of a competing faction. Could Nickerson take any steps to minimize such reactions? Is a gender equity workshop a constructive idea, given the school culture, or would it be more likely to increase the polarization at John Adams High School and make a bad situation worse?

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